New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1946

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NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE — NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Hidden Horizon"

PM

SEPTEMBER 22, 1946

—Kronenberger—

North America, Take It Away

PM Reviews

The bill at the Plymouth Thursday night was a whodunit by Agatha Christie; and the bill came high. For a couple of hours one traveled on a paddle-steamer up the Nile and wondered why murder should have so much the effect of paregoric. One woman was shot dead off-stage, and another on, yet these grisly doings had all the impact of "Pass the salt," while the dialogue didn't have half the liveliness. Since the night was hot, and the theater air-cooled, I feel no bitterness; only fatigue, and a certain boyish wonderment.

The assassinations grow out of a triangle situation, a rich young English girl having swiped the fiancé of a poor one; and the sleuthing is done by a pious archdeacon in gaiters who has God on his side if hardly any one in the audience. As for the acting, I'm afraid it may give Miss Christie the idea that the debacle at the Plymouth is not her fault. You'd know what she meant, but she would still be wrong.—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 20, 1946

Note on Modern Drama

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"It's a very bad business," remarked the studious skipper of a Nile River paddle-boat when he heard that his most opulent passenger had been murdered. Most students of the drama at the Plymouth last evening regarded the skipper's remark as sensible. For Agatha Christie's crime plaything, turned on there together with the air-conditioning, was the most unnecessary article of the season—dull in theme, dull in story, dull in the acting.

Diana Barrymore and Halliwell Hobbes took parts in the proceedings without distinguishing either the play or themselves, and several other actors spoke up when their turns came along. Fortunately, this impartial column was assisted last evening by a modest Texan who was studying Gotham manners. "You know," he said thoughtfully during the second act, "we do some pretty funny things down there. But at the University of Texas I don't think we would raise the curtain on a production like this. At least we would postpone the opening."

'HIDDEN HORIZON.'

Play by Agatha Christie; staged by Albert de Courville; scenery by Charles Elson; costumes by Everett Staples; presented by the Shuberts and Albert de Courville at the Plymouth Theater Thursday evening, September 19, 1946. The cast:

First Bradseller.....Monty Banks Jr.
Second Bradseller.....David Andrews
Steward.....Charles Alexander
Miss Ffoliot-Ffoulkes,
Eva Leonard-Boyne
Christina Grant.....Joy Ann Page
Smith.....David Manners
Louise.....Edith Kingdon
Dr. Beasley.....Peter von Zerneck
Simon Mostyn.....Blair Davies
Kay Mostyn.....Barbara Joyce
Archdeacon Pennyfeather,
Halliwell Hobbes
Jacqueline de Severac.Diana Barrymore
McNaught (ship's captain) Winston Ross
Two Egyptian Policemen
Leland Hamilton and Damian Nimer

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

SEPTEMBER 20, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Bad Business

THERE are more unwitting laughs than calculated thrills in "Hidden Horizon." The new treatise on homicide at the Plymouth may have been a passable murder mystery in book form. On the stage it is quaintly cumbersome. Since Agatha Christie has dramatized her original yarn, she has no one but herself to blame. Her conversations are literary and frequently ridiculous, as when the captain of a Nile River paddle boat, which is the scene of several killings, remarks: "This is a bad business." Her dramatic construction is lamentable. It serves rather to bemuse than mystify an audience.

* * *

Admirers of Miss Christie will find little of the suspense and none of the staccato action which endowed "Ten Little Indians" with a modicum of excitement. The moments of lethal violence in "Hidden Horizon" are not even conventionally startling. The tracking down of the culprit by an elderly prelate is about as lively as a high tea in a parsonage. Without a core of savage and integrated melodrama, the offering falls back on the idle chit-chat which is familiar to whodunit fanciers. It is really idle in "Hidden Horizons."

* * *

As a matter of fact the author is doing a disservice to the literary side of her craft. The stock characters of a charnel puzzle stand out at the Plymouth in painful silhouette. The padding of verbiage which so frequently fills murder-mystery novels like an overstuffed sofa comes out at the seams on the stage. There is no end of nonsense in this production by the Shuberts and Albert de Courville. A snobbish old harridan with an eligible niece does an awkward about-face when she finds that a rude young man is a peer traveling incognito. A Hungarian doctor whom you wouldn't trust with a simple scratch pulls a red-herring act which should not fool a novice at detective thrillers. It is, indeed, bad business.

* * *

Involved in it are several hard-working, but far from persuasive performers. Halliwell Hobbes fumbles understandably with the part of the sleuthing archdeacon. Diana Barrymore drinks double brandies at a great rate, but it makes her more to be envied than applauded. David Manners, Blair Davies, Joy Ann Page and Peter von Zerneck do their stints as stints. It is the most that "Hidden Horizon" deserves. It is a singularly tepid thriller.

The Sun

SEPTEMBER 20, 1946

'Hidden Horizon,' Murder Play, Provides Tiresome Voyage on the Nile.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The season didn't advance last night. "Hidden Horizon," written by Agatha Christie, and escorted into the Plymouth by the Shuberts and Albert de Courville, is a windy and wordy little melodrama, utterly tedious for most of the way. De Courville did the staging, and that didn't help, either.

The author takes us to the Nile for this latest example of shiver-and-quiver theater; takes us, indeed, to the observation salon of the paddle-steamer Lotus. There's murder to be done, and a bride, young, beautiful and very rich, is the first to be killed. The second victim is her French maid, shot just as she is about to be bribed into naming the assassin.

Numerous fellow passengers, including a meddling archdeacon, a German doctor, a titled Englishman traveling under the name of Smith and a relentless young woman, who was a former sweetheart of the bridegroom, and who is on the trail of the honeymooners, are suspected before the drama reaches its placid climax. Then class is dismissed.

Agatha Christie must have set out to write a crawly and creepy murder melodrama, but "Hidden Horizon" is anything but that. Her material hasn't been artfully juggled. Her dialogue is inept and often unintentionally funny, and her characters are monotonous. Suspense is missing, thrills are lacking. In short, "Hidden Horizon" isn't much of a play.

There are no acting honors to pass around, either. Halliwell Hobbes, who is generally good at this sort of thing, putters about as the clergyman, under suspicion, along with everybody else. Diana Barrymore is the mysterious lady, who comes aboard the Lotus with a dainty revolver. Joy Ann Page, in a minor role and in her first Broadway part, makes a pleasant impression. Charles Elson designed the setting, and Everett Staples the costumes.

"Hidden Horizon," a job of quackish and incompetent playwriting, provides a long and tiresome voyage on the Nile.

New York Post

SEPTEMBER 20, 1946

There's One Thing Good About 'Hidden Horizon'

By VERNON RICE

Being in a generous frame of mind with our thoughts on the level with those of Pollyanna, we state right here and now something good has come out of last night's production of Agatha Christie's "Hidden Horizon" at the Plymouth under the auspices of the Messrs. Shubert in association with Albert de Courville.

With "Hidden Horizon" out of the way, we feel certain nothing worse can come in, even with the season just a few weeks old. There may be some plays yet to arrive which will be just as bad, but nothing worse.

Playgoers, therefore, may sigh their sigh of relief today and sit back to await the season's offerings with an air of expectancy.

After "Ten Little Indians" and her stream of popular mystery novels, one should expect better things from Miss Christie than her current mystery play, adapted from her novel, "Murder on the Nile," which appeared in play form in London under the same title. But where "Ten Little Indians" had a certain amount of mounting suspense, "Hidden Horizon" had practically none at all; where "Ten Little Indians" had dialogue that didn't insult the ears, "Hidden Horizon" had dialogue which made one hope for sudden deafness.

Shoddily produced, poorly directed and ineptly acted, we can, at the moment, think of nothing by which to recommend it.

The poor actor caught in such a strong current of unfortunate circumstances can do nothing but pretend that he is in a play worth his time while the curtain is up, as he prays the torture will end more quickly than he knows it will.

Among those found in such a predicament last night were Diana Barrymore, Halliwell Hobbes, David Manners, Blair Davies, Peter von Zerneck, Barbara Joyce and Eva Leonard-Boyne.

There were a number of debuts last evening. Charles Elson was making his bow to Broadway as a scene designer. Everett Staples was costuming his first show. Joy Ann Page, step-daughter of Jack L. Warner; Edith Kingdon, who is really Edith Kingdon Gould, and Monty Banks Jr. were all appearing for the first time in New York.

Young Mr. Banks was more fortunate than his sister debutantes. He appeared as one of two beadsellers, done up as sort of a member of an Egyptian branch of the Gold Dust Twins. It was impossible to identify him. He can do it all over again and no one will know any differently.

As for the others, we can only hope that they will be given another chance soon, under circumstances more auspicious.

Journal my American

SEPTEMBER 20, 1946

'Hidden Horizon' at Plymouth Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

It seems as if, at the beginning of each season, the Messrs. Shubert, encouraged by their Mr. de Courville, produce a dramatization of an Agatha Christie mystery story. Last time, it was "Ten Little Indians." This time, it is "Hidden Horizon." Each time, however, Mr. J. J. and Mr. Lee, out of the kindness of their hearts, invite me around to see it. And each time, out of the hardness of my heart, I don't care very much about it.

Just because I don't, a certain Mr. Greneker calls me on the telephone to say how deeply hurt is Mr. Lee, who is more sensitive or more articulate than Mr. J. J., while I, in turn, assure the certain Mr. Greneker that I'm even more deeply hurt than Mr. Lee over the fact that I didn't care very much about it. This annual exchange of pleasantries completed, "Ten Little Indians" or "Hidden Horizon" is pretty sure to settle down for a run.

Then, quite rightly, Variety, The Billboard and Theatre World place me at the bottom of their scoreboards. Again quite rightly, I receive one letter (unsigned) informing me that I'm God's gift to the American theatre and half-a-hundred others (signed) informing me that I'm every bad thing beginning with a "B," from a babbit to a buzzard. And, once more quite rightly, the new theatrical season is officially under way!

* * *

Bad Marksmen

History, the Messrs. Shubert and their Mr. de Courville repeating themselves, the established theatrical trio produced a dramatization of an Agatha Christie mystery story last night at the Plymouth Theatre. It was the aforementioned "Hidden Horizon," dramatized, as the saying is, by the lady Agatha herself from a Hercule Poirot whodunit known to drugstore bookworms as "Death on the Nile." For two-bits, you can buy it along with your magnesia.

Be this as it is, "it was very peaceful on the river." So begins the pretty plug printed on the paper jacket of the two-bit edition of "Death on the Nile" beside me on my table. Well, it was also very peaceful last night in 45th Street where a cast of 15 characters, 13 featured, worked its determined way through "Death on the Nile" as reproduced in dialog and set on a lighted stage by those Messrs. Shubert and their Mr. de Courville.

Don't ask me what it was all about, for I honestly don't know. All I can tell you is that somebody killed Mrs. Cock Robin. But where, when, or why, or even who, I've no idea. And, which is more deplorable, I just don't care. If a saloon full of dull and disagreeable Englanders want to take a boat ride up the Nile, who am I—or you—to worry about who shoots who between Shellal and Wadi Halfi? I only wish for better marksmen!

* * *

River 'Hedda'

The off-stage killing of Mrs. Cock Robin is about all there is to Agatha Christie's "Hidden Horizon," a dramatization, to again be kind, of Agatha Christie's "Death on the Nile." As Jacquelin de Severac, the pistol-packing mama of the Nile, a sort of Hedda Gabler of the River, Diana Barrymore fares better than she, herself, could have expected. It was sad to watch her walk the plank, pulling a bankside Sydney Carton as her finish.

Among the others, a few kind words may not be amiss for the Archdeacon Pennyfeather of Halliwell Hobbes, whose role is twice as long as Hamlet and a hundred times less interesting. And the Dr. Bessner of Peter von Zerneck who, besides holding the Junior Olympic Three-Weapon Fencing Championship of 1936, is a likely-looking refugee from the 18th Century Russia of Mae West's "Catherine Was Great." And Jack Warner's step-daughter, Joy Ann Page.

The dozen remaining characters speak Miss Christie's lines as they follow Mr. de Courville's directions. But, even so, Charles Elson's paddle-ship Lotus, on which the mishap happens, never paddles off from 45th st. So, here and now, well ahead of schedule, I admit quite frankly that it hurts me more than it hurts anything or anybody, including the Messrs. Shubert's Mr. Lee, to report that I don't care very much about "Hidden Horizon." But if it wants to run, let it!

DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 20, 1946

Hey, Union! There's A Phony Sound to Chapman's Ailment

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

The Grievance Committee,
New York Newspaper Guild,
Dear Sirs:

It started yesterday. Mr. John Chapman, theatre critic of this newspaper, called me up and said he had had a tooth pulled. He claimed he had to go to the hospital. He said he thought the sulfa drugs he had taken had left a deposit. Well, it was no such deposit as a play called "Hidden Horizon" which arrived at the Plymouth last night.

Now, as a member of the Guild, do I have to sit around theatres and be embarrassed for a lot of poor actors just because Chapman has a sore kisser? Okay, I thought so. And why Actors Equity doesn't do something to protect its union members I'll never know.

At one point, a character in "Hidden Horizon" says "She's dead!"

Another character shakes his head. "A very bad business," he admits. It was an audience yok and there I was sitting with an actor who realized that the same thing might be happening to him, someday.

This mystery is by Agatha Christie, who proved long ago she can write mysteries. Maybe she has come to the point where she thinks she can now do it without trying. Here's the story, briefly:

A bride and groom, and the latter's jilted girl friend, are all on a paddle steamer plying the Nile "between Shellah and Wadi Halfa." There are other characters on the steamer, all of whom have vague reasons to hate one another. About Halfa Wadi to Wadi Halfa somebody murders the bride. Then somebody murders her maid. Then everybody sits down and talks things over.

There is a background of the Nile which looks like Orchard Beach after a tough weekend and the inside of the steamer looked to me dangerously like the one which once deposited me at the Norfolk Navy Yard.

Diana Barrymore, the youngest of a great theatrical family, is concerned in "Hidden Horizon." Joy Ann Page, step-daughter of movie tycoon Jack Warner, is also in it. So is Monty Banks Jr., whose pop is another successful movie man. The elder Barrymores, Warners and Banks should all be forced to see that movie called "Where Are Your Children?" Another lead is played by the veteran Halliwell Hobbes, but he's old enough to know better.

It's purely awful to sit in a Broadway theatre and listen to a first night audience guffaw embarrassedly while a crew of working actors have to drag themselves through something like "Hidden Horizon."

Let's hope it doesn't happen again this season.

New York World-Telegram

SEPTEMBER 20, 1946

Mystery Is, Why Such a Play?

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A cast of the greatest stars in history could not make "Hidden Horizon" entertaining. As presented last night at the Plymouth, this languidly slung together mystery by Agatha Christie is an amateurish bore.

The play is given an inept performance by an uninteresting group of actors. It is a mechanical hash of familiar elements, without suspense or excitement.

The whole affair takes place in a steamer on the Nile. An heiress who has married her best friend's fiance is murdered. When her maid is tempted to give the criminal away, she, too, goes the way of all tattle-tale flesh in mystery stories.

Suspicion points in turn at the archdeacon guardian of the heiress, the jilted girl and the husband. By way of weak insinuation it waves a limp pinky at a doctor aboard.

Characters in Story.

Complicating this setup in an impersonal and disinterested way are a rich and selfish old lady, her browbeaten niece and a mysterious young man who is rude to everybody. The last refuses to button his collar and wears a red 'kerchief around his neck. He spouts Communism and turns out to be a wealthy lord.

The jilted girl is taking a barren revenge by following the heiress and her husband on their honeymoon. She finally gets drunk and shoots the gentleman in the ankle.

In the hubbub that follows the wife is found dead in her bed with a bullet in her head. From there on it is just a matter of who was where, when and why.

The archdeacon had had a blithe habit of getting the heiress to sign money over for a New Jerusalem, which was apparently an original thought with him. The doctor has a Hungarian accent, so naturally is an object of suspicion.

A Free-for-All.

This is all solved with a most complicated explanation, which simply occurs to one of the characters. Nothing is evolved with any ingenuity or significant action.

The play resembles a free-for-all fight, as loyal seconds support staggering bodies in and out of the room. When the heiress' husband is shot he behaves like Mr. Mauriello did Wednesday night, except that by some ingenious ballet work he lands in a chair.

The closest thing to humor in "Hidden Horizon" is the following dialogue: Q. How is she? A. Dead.

It is difficult to be kind about the acting. Diana Barrymore has more assurance than authority as the jilted girl. She has a certain fire, but her timing suggests that she would like to get that final curtain down quick.

Halliwell Hobbes gives a routine character study of the archdeacon. There is a feeling about his reading that many of the lines were altered shortly before the performance started, which might very well be the truth.

No Credit to Cast.

The only person who may not regret being involved in this production is Joy Ann Page, who makes her Broadway debut as the subservient niece. The character has gentleness and spunk. Miss Page has no ingenious projection, but she has quality.

David Manners is awkward and embarrassed as the Communistic aristocrat, and Eva Leonard-Boyne is obvious in the uninteresting part of the selfish older traveler.

Peter Von Zerneck and Barbara Joyce add nothing startling to the watery roles of the doctor and the heiress. Edith Kingdon is fair enough as the maid, and Blair Davies has a humiliating and monotonous time coping with the heiress' husband.

This was one time when the opening night audience might be pardoned for its rudeness.

"Gypsy Lady"

The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 18, 1946

'Gypsy Lady' Offers Melodies From Victor Herbert's 'The Fortune Teller' and 'The Serenade'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Folks, the main point is this: In order to listen to a few pleasant melodies by Victor Herbert, do we have to stand for all this nonsense? In the instance put on at the New Century last evening, the nonsense was labeled "Gypsy Lady," which includes music written by Victor Herbert for two of his operettas, "The Fortune Teller" and "The Serenade." Some of the melodies are very pleasant, indeed, such as the "Gypsy Love Song," "I Love You, I Adore You" and "Springtide," although there is no use pretending that everything Herbert wrote is immortal. To push Mark Twain around a little, melodious music often sounds better than it is.

To get the melodies behind footlights again, Henry Myers has written a new book, said on competent authority to be better than two originals. But still a play-goer who is beginning to wonder what year is this anyway, can hardly help observing that the book depends upon snobberies that are no longer tolerable in this enlightened age, that the Duke of Roncevalle says, "Romance is piff-paff," with an air of discharging a witticism that the operetta opens with an artist, wearing regulation smock and tam and painting a spurious picture on a prop easel and that the whole thing resounds in its mere impish moments to screams of girlish laughter.

Believing in doing an old thing well, Edwin Lester has produced "The Gypsy Lady" with taste and enthusiasm. The costumes by Miles White are notably well designed. When Boris Aronson's settings get down to business in the third scene, they, too, are notable for imaginative gaiety.

Mr. Lester has also assembled an excellent cast of people who can sing formal music and also act. Among the good singers are Doreen Wilson, John Tyers, George Britton, Gilbert Russell and Joseph Macaulay, who is an old hand at this sort of thing. Helena Bliss as the gypsy social-climber has not only a beautiful trained voice but the temperament of an actress.

Melville Cooper as the bogus majesty is an amusing comic, and Jack Goode is as funny as an arthritic book permits him to be. And here is our Clarence Derwent bestowing his familiar elegancies on the Baron Pettibone. From California, where all girls are either born beautiful or become beautiful before the crucial age of 16, Mr. Lester has brought some lovely dancing damsels who are not thrown by a bustle.

Although Mr. Lester has reached far back into the dusty stacks for his material, credit him with having done his best to make it look and sound attractive. But the odor of "The Student Prince" hangs round it. After several glimpses at the dead gaiety of yesteryear, now we know that Gilbert was the best thing that ever happened to Sullivan. Or vice versa, for that matter.

'GYPSY LADY.'

Music by Victor Herbert combining melodies from two of his operettas, "The Fortune Teller" and "The Serenade"; musical adaptation and direction, orchestral and choral arrangements by Arthur Kay; book by Henry Myers; stage direction and the new lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest; vocal numbers by Lew Kesler; scenery by Boris Aronson; dance direction, Aida Broadbent; costumes by Miles White; lighting by Adrian Awan; presented by Edwin Lester at the Century Theater Tuesday evening, September 17, 1946. The cast:

Baron Pettibone ..... Clarence Derwent
Yvonne ..... Kaya Connor
Preece ..... Jack Goode
Musetta ..... Helena Bliss
Sergeant of Gendarmes ..... Edmund Dorsay
The Great Alvarado ..... John Tyers
Valerie, Marquise of Roncevalle ..... Doreen Wilson
Imri ..... Val Valentinoff
Rudolfo ..... William Bauer
Boris ..... Melville Cooper
Roszika ..... Patricia Sims
Sandor ..... George Britton
Andre, Marquis of Roncevalle ..... Gilbert Russell
Stephan, Duke of Roncevalle ..... Joseph Macaulay
The Undecided Mademoiselle ..... Suzette Meredith
M. Guilbert Armand ..... Bert Hillier
Majordomo ..... Harvey Shahan

New York Post

SEPTEMBER 18, 1946

Sing That Tune to Lester, Producer of 'Gypsy Lady'

By VERNON RICE

Somebody ought to sing the tune, "Once Too Often," to Edwin Lester. Not, heaven forbid, to have him make an operetta out of it. It should be hummed slowly and softly as a subtle reminder that because he has done it before is no reason he can do it again—the taking the music of a well-known composer and weaving a story around it.

Or better still, just keep him out of musical libraries. After viewing "Gypsy Lady" at the Century last night, it has become quite apparent that steps of some sort should be taken to quell this urge that may well work itself into a mania.

The producer did it before with the music of Edvard Grieg in "Song of Norway." And now, he's tried to do it again with the music of Victor Herbert from the composer's "The Fortune Teller" and "The Serenade." The results are far from satisfactory.

A brand new book was written by Henry Myers and brought in to form the background for the score and Robert Wright and George Forrest wrote new lyrics for most of the songs, leaving "Romany Life" and "Gypsy Love Song" the lyrics Harry B. Smith originally wrote.

What New Book?

A new book, did we say? Well, that's what Mr. Lester calls it.

The book may be new to this particular set of tunes and to Mr. Lester, but certainly not to anyone who has so much as sat upon his old Mammy's knee at story telling time.

This is the one about the gypsy maiden who wants to be the grand lady and have lots of money and move with the upper classes. A baron and an actor take her over and pass her off as a princess (she's really a gypsy princess, of course), the daughter of a king of some non-existent country.

The actor, you see, has been snubbed by a daughter of a Duke, and he wants to get even. He wants the gypsy lady to become engaged to the snooty lady's brother, and then won't that be a very funny joke? Oh yes indeed it will!

Needless to say, all turned out in some fancy Parisian frocks, the wild gypsy is devastation itself. Not only is the brother overcome with love, but the actor falls for her, besides all, the basses, baritones and tenors for miles around. But, drat the luck, she goes back to Sandor, her true love, because he's a gypsy and gets to sing the "Gypsy Love Song."

Tongues Got Lost

Mr. Lester explains in an advance note, "The concept behind the book was that it was to be a modern, light, tongue-in-cheek treatment of the stock period operetta story."

Mr. Lester may have had his tongue in his cheek, but the actors' tongues didn't have a chance to get anywhere near their cheeks, so busy were they in song-tripping.

It was a veritable land of chests out, deep breathing, mouths opened wide at the Century last night. With all that work, it's good to be able to report that it had its results. Nice, clear voices filled the theatre with songs and the songs were pleasant to listen to.

Helena Bliss as Musetta, the gypsy, and Doreen Wilson, as Valerie, the snobbish Marquise, having had previous experience in this school of singing, both being alumnae of "Song of Norway," came through with voices strong and true. John Tyers, Gilbert Russell and George Britton, playing the actor, the Great Alvarado, Andre, the Marquis, and Sandor, the gypsy, respectively, the men who could not stand up to the wiles of Musetta, carried on the vocal battle for the male's side, and need make no apology for their lung powers or their ranges. Mr. Britton, who sang the melodious and familiar "Gypsy Love Song," could be singing it still, had not the show, for some unexplainable reason, to go on.

Clarence Derwent, in the role of a proprietor of an art school, and Melville Cooper, playing Boris, the gypsy king, are such capable performers that it is best to overlook the silly things they had to do. The same can be said for Jack Goode and Joseph Macaulay.

Val Valentinoff, the excellent dancer, had a fleeting moment to perform the vigorous high jumps and fast motion he combines in his dancing.

It's too bad Edwin Lester couldn't have just had these people get up and sing these numbers of Victor Herbert's rather than burden them down with the book, tongue in or out of cheek.

****

DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 18, 1946

'Gypsy Lady' a Pleasant Package Of Herbert Melodies Nicely Sung

By JOHN CHAPMAN

What the Readers' Digest did to belles lettres Edwin Lester has done to bel canto—wrapped up a lot of short jolts of stuff in one package. Mr. Lester's enterprise is "Gypsy Lady," which opened at the Century last evening. Like the Digest, the show is pretty solemn, but a laugh sneaks in once in a while because Melville Cooper is in the cast and he could make even a medical article sound funny.

"Gypsy Lady" contains sixteen song numbers by Victor Herbert, not to mention entr'-acte and ballet material, cribbed from two Herbert shows, "The Fortune Teller" and "The Serenade." New lyrics have been written by Robert Wright and George Forrest for all but two of the tunes—"Romany Life" and "Gypsy Love Song" (slum-mber on-n, my litt-ul gypsy sweetheart)—for which the original Harry B. Smith words have been kept.

And a new plot has been written by Henry Myers, now a novelist and screen writer who became famous years ago as a theatre press agent by sending out a bulletin to the press, "There is no news about 'Kibitzer' today."

Not Revolutionary.

There isn't much news about the plot, either. Advance information supplied by the producer's office said that the story was to be a modern, tongue-in-cheek treatment of the stock period operetta, but I don't know whose tongue was in whose cheek because the plot is just like any other operetta. It has a heroine and some lovers and a count and a countess and the heroine, a romany pickpocket, gets disguised as a princess.

In this season of revivals, levitations and necrophilia "Gypsy Lady" is quite pleasant. The tunes are, of course, tuneful, being Herbert's, and they all sound like old favorites even if you've never heard them before. The production is well staged, very smartly dressed by Miles White and decorated by chorus girls who can sing, dance and look pretty. These babes must have come from California, where "Gypsy Lady" originated, and it just goes to show what a vitamin can do for a female.

Cooper as Bogus Royalty.

Mr. Cooper, as a self-elected king of a gypsy band who pretends that he is a real king of real nobility, is very funny. When he is questioned about the family jewels he replies that oh, yes, his family has been picking up jewels all over the world, but he's waiting for some of them to cool off a bit.

In the singing department "Gypsy Lady" is generously staffed. Helena Bliss, who was a sad and suffering heroine in "Song of Norway," now is Musetta, the lass of the title role—a pocket-picking, fortune-telling version of Carmen. There are not many voices as good as hers on the Broadway stage.

Among the gents who sing to her, at her or with her are John Tyers, in the role of a matinee idol; George Britton, who does the "slumber on" song with style and restraint; Gilbert Russell, a titled lover, and Joseph Macaulay, a harmless villain. Clarence Derwent has the role of a French baron but I thought he was trying to imitate a pigeon. If he doesn't stop flapping his hands he's going to take off one of these nights and land in a tree in Central Park.

New York World-Telegram

SEPTEMBER 18, 1946

'Gypsy Lady' First-Rate Operetta

Victor Herbert Songs Recast Successfully

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Gypsy Lady" is a lusty, vigorous musical that offers operetta fans the finest kind of fare. It is rooted deep in the traditions of light opera and makes the most of them.

It is funny and colorful and its music soars out with gusto. It never wastes a second, but says what it has to say, sings what it has to sing and gets off the stage.

The most newsworthy element of this production is the emergence of Helena Bliss as a personality of true stature in the musical field. She plays the gypsy princess with real fire and wit. She is a vivid lifeline of the show, and sings her demanding music with generosity and ease.

Story of Operetta.

The story of "Gypsy Lady" was contrived to use the best numbers of Victor Herbert's scores to "The Fortune Teller" and "Serenade." It concerns an actor, Alvarado, who would like to marry Valerie, a marquise, but who is considered a commoner by her father.

To smash this aristocratic convention, Alvarado persuades Musetta, a discontented gypsy princess, to masquerade as a real princess and marry Valerie's brother. His ruse is so successful that he falls in love with Musetta himself. But in the end she turns down both suitors for her first gypsy love.

Some of the brightest moments of a very bright evening are supplied by Melville Cooper as Musetta's father, a lusty, covetous Romany ruler who takes rich advantage of every opportunity his aristocracy gains him.

It is an excellent cast that Edwin Lester has assembled, a roster that has an abundance of riches. There are three leading men, Gilbert Russell, George Britton and John Tyers, all of them handsome and all blessed with good voices.

Almost Stop the Show.

Russell is the Marquis, and with Miss Bliss last night caused a minor crisis with their duet of "Springtide," when the audience tried to stop the show and the singers would not give in to the demands for an encore.

Britton is the virile gypsy who sings the familiar "Gypsy Love Song" with unaffected taste. Tyers is the matinee idol. He looks the part and gives a haunting quality to the "Serenade" that runs as a theme through the score.

Doreen Wilson makes a striking blond Marquise, who deals melodiously with her songs, and Kaye Connor reveals another good voice in her role of an impudent dancing student.

The cast has a wealth of comedy. Aside from Cooper's incomparable portrait of the gypsy king, there is Clarence Derwent as a conniving owner of a ballet school, and Joseph Macauley to deal knowingly with the part of the Duke. Jack Goode is the jumpy and officious dancing teacher.

Adequate Book.

There is some wildly vigorous gypsy dancing by Val Valentinoff, in some of which he is assisted by the lovely looking Patricia Sims.

In the Lester tradition, this show is graced by a fresh and sparkling ensemble. When these youngsters start to sing, they know what they are about.

The book which Henry Myers has written provides enough complication to serve the songs and keep things moving with good humor. It also has the unoperetta-like good grace to let the heroine solve her amorous problems by the simple procedure of making up her mind which man she prefers. It lets the whole affair wind up when the time comes with a minimum of fuss.

Miles White has gowned the show with perky humor and an appropriate lushness, and the settings of Boris Aronson give the camp scenes vivid roughness.

Everything about "Gypsy Lady" is done with dispatch. This is particularly true of the musical presentations. They are given all they are worth.

Miss Bliss makes a passionate and graphic thing of "Romany Life," and "My Treasure" in the hands of George Britton is deeply affecting. "The World and I" is hauntingly melodious when Russell and Tyers sing it with the chorus. Macauley, Miss Wilson and Russell give "Piff Paff" a bright charm, and "Reality" becomes hilarious patter when the Messrs. Cooper, Derwent and Goode go to work on it.

In a year when nostalgia for another generation's light opera seems almost universal in the theater, 'Gypsy Lady" stands head and shoulders above its predecessors for vitality, beauty and wit.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

SEPTEMBER 18, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Romany Shindigs

TWO Victor Herbert operettas have been agreeably amalgamated in "Gypsy Lady." The new show at the Century has plucked lilting and familiar melodies from "The Fortune Teller" and "The Serenade." These have been activated theatrically by Henry Myers in a remarkably inoffensive libretto and they are sung with reticent competence by a willing company. Since Melville Cooper is on hand to interrupt the music with comedy in a comic opera potsome artful clowning as a gypsy Mike Romanoff, there is genuine pourri. Operetta fanciers in general, and Herbert fans in particular, should be gratified by this Edwin Lester production.

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It was he, you will remember, who made Edvard Grieg a light opera composer in "The Song of Norway." Like its predecessor "Gypsy Lady" leans heavily on its score. Robert Wright and George Forrest have indited new lyrics for most of the songs, with such new titles of old favorites as "I Love You, I Adore You," "My Treasure," "Springtime" and "Serenade." They have not tampered, incidentally, with the sonorous sentimentality of "Gypsy Love Song," or "Romany Life." The numbers are still pleasant, by any name. They create the mood of a gently hopped up revival.

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One of the chief delights of the offering is the fact that the performers, while scarcely inspired, match each other nicely in the tune fest. Helena Bliss sings the title role with tempered ardor, and John Tyers handles the part of Alvarado, who passes off the light-fingered gypsy as a princess, with romantic aplomb. Doreen Wilson is attractive as the marquise, whom Alvarado tries to humiliate, and Gilbert Russell adds his unaffected tenor to a principal role as the marquis who is the unwitting but willing accomplice to an attempted hoax.

As might be guessed the book is no great shakes. To its credit it stands the music in good stead, whether slipping in song cues or assembling the ensembles in dances and choral interludes. It is only when Cooper is taking over with the brightest lines in the work that it has anything approaching distinction. When the actor kicks an imaginary train, or discusses dowries with a duke, he is inimitably amusing. Val Valentinoff executes standing high jumps in the crowd numbers and Jack Goode, Kaye Connor and George Brittton are effective in lessor roles. The Boris Aronson sets and Miles White's costumes are traditional and rather tasteful. The whole work is best summed up by those adjectives.

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PM Exclusive

SEPTEMBER 19, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

Victor Herbert Goes It Alone

PM Reviews

Two Victor Herbert operettas, *The Fortune Teller* and *The Serenade*, have supplied the music for *Gypsy Lady*, which is otherwise quite, quite new. However, it cannot be said that *Gypsy Lady* seems like a marriage of May and December; both parties to it seem well along in years. Either Henry Myers, in writing the libretto, kept sternly in mind that *Gypsy Lady* was to be subtitled a "period piece," or it was hastily decided to call it a period piece after the libretto was turned in. I guess even human nature will change before operetta-writing does. To be sure, Mr. Myers had the music to reckon with: if that all-too-famous tune, *Gypsy Love Song*, was to grace the occasion, Mr. Myers obviously had to throw in a couple of gypsies; and if you throw in a couple of gypsies, Mr. Myers doubtless reasoned, you might as well throw in a carload. Then again, every operetta must plainly make a heavy raid on the peerage; and if you weave dukes and gypsies into the same plot—well, it just *is* the same plot, the one that grandpa saw on his twelfth birthday, and you sit through it with drooping spirits and drooping eyelids.

On its own terms, *Gypsy Lady* might be worse—though there's really no reason in the world why it shouldn't be better. The Victor Herbert melodies are tuneful; and as music—what with that gypsy thing, and *The World and I* and *I Love You, I Adore You*—*Gypsy Lady* is very nice. There are also pleasant voices in the show, and powerful lungs. In the title role Helena Bliss sings well and acts acceptably; and Gilbert Russell and (much of the time) John Tvers sing well too. There is dancing of sorts, and Miles White's costumes have color. And there is Melville Cooper, waiting, like the sun on a cloudy day, for the chance to shine: he gets the chance once or twice, and then is very amusing.

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As a period piece, *Gypsy Lady* sadly lacks style, and so has neither a good nostalgie flavor nor a good tongue-in-cheek one—for I refuse to believe that the general woodenness of the acting is deliberate.

All in all, Victor Herbert has to go it alone. I have had, I confess, much worse times at operetta; but *Gypsy Lady* is still not my idea of a good time in the theater.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

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The Sun

SEPTEMBER 18, 1946

'Gypsy Lady' Offers Some Delightful Music, and a Positively Deadly Libretto.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The slow-moving season stirred itself last night and the playhouse known as the Century, there on the southern margin of Central Park, went back into the theatrical business with the presentation of "Gypsy Lady," an operetta put together to bring back old songs of Victor Herbert. The production comes to town via the West Coast play factory of Edwin Lester.

The best of "Gypsy Lady" is, of course, the Herbert music, taken for the most part from "The Serenade" ('97) and "The Fortune Teller" ('98)—music that is blended with a book that is humorless and painful in its deadliness. Arthur Kay has been considerably more successful in his adaptation and orchestration of the Herbert melodies than Henry Myers was in fashioning a libretto to go along with them.

The production has some style, the costumes of Miles White are nice enough, and the principals, while not overpowering, are generally all right. But even the Victor Herbert score is not sufficiently beguiling to overcome the burden of the libretto, one in the "Pygmalion" tradition, and all about the romance between a famous actor and a wild gypsy girl who is passed off for a time as a princess. She doesn't take to the new life too well and goes back to her people.

The Herbert music of long ago is now represented, engagingly and tunefully, by such numbers as "Gypsy Love Song," "The Serenade," "On a Wonderful Day Like Today," "The World and I" and "Piff Paff." There is good singing from Helena Bliss, in the role of Musetta, who has her whirl with the nobility; from John Tyers, as Alvarado, the great lover and actor, and George Britton, gigantic and vocal, and out of the gypsy camp.

The comedy portions of "Gypsy Lady," being tormentingly unfunny throughout, places the droll and waggish Melville Cooper, playing the ruler of the gypsies, at something of a disadvantage, but he goes through the evening without giving up. Clarence Derwent is the bland and articulate Baron, Doreen Wilson is on the handsome side as the Marquise, and Jack Goode strives to wring some fun from a secondary role. The vocally efficient Joseph Macauley has the part of the Duke.

There is a lot of color in the new production at the Century, some spirited dancing and good ensemble effects. The melodies from two of the old-time Herbert operettas have been combined in this new offering by arrangement with the late conductor-composer's daughter, Ella Herbert Bartlett.

The delightful music in "Gypsy Lady" is not enough to offset the gawky book. Edwin Lester's new production is by no means another "Song of Norway."